

# T<sup>3</sup>: Trustee Training Tips

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Kentucky Department for Libraries & Archives

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## WHO'S THE BOSS? YOU ARE, SORT OF...

Nobody ever said public library trusteeship was easy, and it never seems to be more difficult than when board members try to walk that fine line between demanding accountability and micro-managing. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to this dilemma; each situation is unique and must be judged by its own circumstances. There are, however, general rules to guide the trustee.

The library board has one employee—the director. All other library staff are employees of that director. The director hires, evaluates, disciplines, and terminates. The library board approves an annual operating budget. All expenditures accounted for in that budget are the responsibility of the director and do not need further board approval. The library board adopts policies to govern the library's operations and personnel. The director is responsible for explaining these to staff and for seeing that they are carried out according to the board's intent.

Sounds pretty straightforward and simple? Evidently not, as many library boards find themselves involved in details that are really the director's responsibility. This is the micro-managing part. Not only does it take a lot of trustee time and energy better spent elsewhere, but the real damage comes from undermining the director's position.

In an effort to avoid micro-managing, many boards take such a hands-off stance that they do not require the accountability of the director that they should. Yes, the director is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the library, but the board of trustees is ultimately responsible for giving the community the best library it can. To assure that is happening, the board must demand full accountability from its employee—the director. That means providing financial reports that all trustees can understand, keeping the board informed about issues, needs, and successes, meeting all government and legal requirements, advising the board on long-range planning, providing accurate and understandable information on any specific topic when requested, managing staff successfully, and keeping the public relatively happy (no small feat!). In addition, the board expects its director to exercise good judgement in arriving at decisions, to be ethical and honest, and to get along well with others—especially the leaders of the community. Requiring accountability means *knowing* all this is done, not just assuming it is.

## ISSUES FOR BOARDS

One big surprise for most trustees upon starting their career as a board member is the number of laws and regulations they are expected to follow. Fortunately, the Trustee Manual highlights the most common and essential statutes and offers advice on how both a board and an individual trustee may lessen his/her liability.

**Minutes:** At each monthly library board meeting the minutes of the previous meeting are approved and so noted for the current meeting's minutes. These minutes are subject to the Open Records Act (KRS 61.872-61.884) and their accuracy is extremely important. Once approved, they become the legal record of the library's business—whether what they say actually happened or not! Minutes must be available to anyone wishing to see them “within a reasonable time” after approval.

Written minutes of all open meetings must be kept and should include:

- nature of the meeting (regular or called)
- date, time, and place of meeting
- members recorded, by name, as present or absent
- approval of previous meeting's minutes, signed by both president and secretary
- substance of all matters decided
- any other information the board requests to be included
- record of adjournment

The secretary's minutes may be kept in a loose-leaf binder. While handwritten minutes are perfectly legal, in fairness to those who must read them, typewritten or computer generated is preferable. The minutes and other records should be kept in a secure (and fireproof) place between meetings. The location of all library records should be known to all members of the board.

**Financial Reports:** The next standard action on most library board meeting agendas is the financial report. What is most critical about this report is that all trustees understand it. Do not be embarrassed if you do not. Some reports assume a bookkeeper or accountant's background knowledge, and if you are having difficulty following it, chances are others are just as confused. Just remember that it is you, the trustee, who is responsible for the wise stewardship (trusteeship) of the public's money. Know what you're doing.

Most library or non-profit board tips will quickly state that approval of bills at each meeting is a waste of trustee time. Be that as it may, in Kentucky there are laws (KRS 173.360, 173.540, and 173.755) that require trustees to approve itemized vouchers at each meeting. And the taxing district libraries are required to have these vouchers signed by both president and secretary—after approval, of course.

Remember on page one of this publication the suggestion that the good board approves a budget and then lets the director spend accordingly? That can still be done. The board does not need to spend time listening to requests or justification for specific expenditures that are already in the budget. Trustees have the added security of an itemized voucher each month showing the checks that have been written. The good director will bring to the attention of the board anything extraordinary or unusual on the voucher.

Boards need to monitor and evaluate the library's revenues and expenses. Do so by asking: “what was budgeted, what is the year to date total, are we on track, why or why not?”

## NEW TRUSTEE ORIENTATION

Soon after each new trustee is appointed to his/her library board, the local regional librarian will offer to set up a new trustee orientation. This session is flexible and can be done at a site and time convenient to the new trustee(s). As eager as new board members are to assume their responsibilities, all are encouraged to take advantage of this educational opportunity. Trustees will adequately and comfortably fulfill their legal responsibilities only when they understand the powers and obligations of their new role.

What can the new trustee expect at this orientation session? First of all, the regional librarian will be talking about general trusteeship and the relationship between the local library and KDLA (which includes the regional office, of course). Details about the local library will come from the library director, most likely at a separate session. Other items that may be covered include:

- ✓ general duties of all trustees
- ✓ general duties of specific officers
- ✓ open meetings information
- ✓ open records information
- ✓ overview of key statutes
- ✓ library bill of rights
- ✓ overview of KDLA services
- ✓ State Aid, Collection Development and competitive grants from KDLA
- ✓ KDLA's statewide consultants
- ✓ KDLA's regional office services

Each Trustee will be given a copy of the *Kentucky Public Library Trustee Manual* and put on the mailing lists for the *Kentucky Public Library Newsletter* and *T<sup>3</sup>: Trustee Training Tips*. The newsletter is a bi-monthly publication and the training tips come out quarterly.

## EXCUSED OR UNEXCUSED?

As many public library trustees come from some facet of the educational community, the question often arises about *excused* absences from board meetings. While this concept is very familiar to educators, it just doesn't exist in a public library context. The statutes regarding attendance at board meetings (KRS 173.040; 173.340; 173.490; 173.730), state that the absence of a trustee from four regular monthly meetings in a term year constitutes an automatic resignation. There are no provisions for excused or unexcused absences. It simply boils down to one is either there or not there. And while it may seem a bit harsh to some, the idea behind this legislation is that, no matter how good one might be as a trustee, unless you are there to contribute your value is lost.

If a trustee finds himself/herself in an extraordinary situation that is going to cause absences enough to trigger the automatic resignation, perhaps the library would be better served if he/she stepped aside by officially resigning and waiting until a new vacancy existed a bit later.

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## LIBRARY LETTERS

*Dear Marian Librarian,  
Our board secretary always notes when one of us comes in late or leaves early. Is he trying to embarrass us?*

*-- Troubled Trustee*

Dear Troubled,

No, he's actually doing his job correctly. Recording late comers and early leavers has a very real purpose—to show that a quorum is present for each and every vote. According to the venerable *Roberts Rules of Order* (and Kentucky Revised Statutes), business cannot be conducted unless a quorum is present. While discussion can continue if a meeting loses its quorum, no question can be decided except when a quorum is present. So, your secretary is not trying to embarrass you, he's protecting you!

## HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

The following quiz will let you test your knowledge on the topics covered in this publication. The answers can be found on KDLA's web page <[www.kdla.net](http://www.kdla.net)> under "Newsletters" in the left column.

1. Should the library board determine which staff members take library-paid classes for certification?
2. Who has to sign the approved minutes each month?
3. Who signs the approved itemized voucher of monthly expenses?
4. How can a new board member start to learn the basics of library trusteeship?
5. What are some circumstances that qualify for excused absences from board meetings?

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## ANSWERS TO T<sup>3</sup> QUIZ:

- 1. Should the library board determine which staff members take library-paid classes for certification?**

*No, this is a library director's duty. Once the board approved the budget, which includes an amount for Continuing Education (CE), the library director determines how those funds are to be specifically spent.*

- 2. Who has to sign the approved minutes each month?**

*Both the president and the secretary. (Robert's Rules of Order, Article VII, §§40, 41).*

- 3. Who signs the approved itemized voucher of monthly expenses?**

*For taxing district libraries established under 173.450 or 173.710, both the president and the secretary. (KRS 173.540; 755) Non-taxing district libraries are still required to have full board approval of itemized vouchers, but the statutes do not specify the vouchers being signed (KRS 173.360) although it would not be a bad idea.*

- 4. How can a new board member start to learn the basics of library trusteeship?**

*By attending a New Trustee Orientation offered by the regional librarian. This can be scheduled at the convenience of the trustee(s) and generally takes around an hour. Your regional librarian can give you a more accurate estimate of the time he/she expects it will take.*

- 5. What are some circumstances that qualify for excused absences from board meetings?**

*Trick question! There are no excused or unexcused absences from a public library board meeting. One is either there or not there. And remember that each trustee is allowed to miss only three (3) times in a term year--on the fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) miss he/she has automatically resigned from the board. The "term year" is the 12-month period that board member terms run for your library. Ask your regional librarian if you are uncertain about any of the above.*